CARVER LIVING NEWSPAPER PROJECT: ORAL HISTORY

Interview with Mrs. Brenda Hudson, resident of Clay House
Interviewed by Laura Plybon
Date: January 3, 2000

Interviewer's questions in bold.

What's your age?
39

When and where were you born?
Richmond, Virginia

Where did you go to school?
George Wythe High School

In Richmond?
Yes

What churches did you attend?
Bainbridge Baptist and presently I attend Blessed Holy Trinity.

Is that in Carver?
It's in the Fan.

Where did you live when you grew up in Richmond?
Southside

Where in Southside?
Bainbridge community

How long have you lived in Carver?
Seven years

What are your experiences like in Carver? How did you get to Carver?
Before I came here I was homeless and living in a homeless shelter in Richmond. And this came about from the Clayhouse. So I moved here.

Can you tell me about it? Because I don't know anything about any Clay House. Well, actually, there's some skeptics in Carver who wasn't really thrilled about (mumbling) but gradually its moved up. They gave it a chance when it came in.

So how do you get into Clay House? Is there a waiting list?
Seven months
But not for you there wasn't?
Right. Because I was one of the first. I signed up.

So it started seven years ago. How did you hear about it?
A lady, originally one of the founders of New Clay House, came around to the shelter talking about this program. So, when the time came I applied. And I was one of the original people who lived there.

How many people came in?
48

Forty-eight? And how many people can you take? 48?
Yes

So what's the community like here? At the New Clay House itself?
Just quiet.

It's quiet. And you live by yourself?
Yes

You like that? But you have a community of people?
Right.

Here? Is that right?
Right.

So you eat, do you have meals downstairs there?
Yeah, with the younger people.

Oh really. Do you like it?
Yeah.

How do you like Carver?
It's okay. If I feel like living over on Southside I can live over there because there's not much difference. But there's more housing. And it's pretty quiet. There's not too much going on here.

So you think Bainbridge and Carver are a lot alike?
Yes

How are they alike?
Well, they're both Black neighborhoods.

So you grew up in Bainbridge?
Yes.
What was it like growing up there?
Well, usually full houses, and there wasn’t a lot of drugs living there, not a lot of crime stuff that you find everywhere.

Do you find that in Carver?
No.

Do you spend a lot of time in the community?
I go to the Carver meetings.

And you go to the CACIL meetings?
No, the Carver meetings. The Carver Civic League.

Well, can you explain that? Because I know a little bit about it. I know Barbara Abernathy. Well, we just meet and we talk about what’s going on in the community, and the schedule for the events that’s coming, and we talk about the events.

How did you get involved with it?
Through Barbara Abernathy.

How did you meet her?
Through working.

Cause she’s on the committee. Isn’t she?
That’s right.

And I want to ask you about your family. Is that alright?
Okay.

How many people are in your family?
Two sisters and a brother.

Do they live in Richmond?
Well my brother lives in Chesterfield, and I’m not too sure about my two sisters.

Were you married at one time?
God, I’d rather not go into it.

Okay. Do you have any children?
I have two girls and a boy.

How old are they?
Two girls are 22 and 17, and the boy is 18

Where are they?
They all live in Richmond.
And what kind of music do you like?
All kinds of music.

What was your favorite school subject?
English and history.

I was not good at history. Can you remember the dates? I remember 1066. But I don't know what that was for. And you've lived here for seven years? Let's see, What did you do for fun as a child?
I liked listening to music.

Living in Bainbridge, what do you remember in your childhood about your neighborhood?
Did you enjoy living there?
Well, everybody knew everybody.

Do you think that's changed?
{unintelligible response}

What's the hardest thing that you ever had to face?
Being homeless.

Being homeless. Can you tell me about that if you feel comfortable?
Well, I was out doing my job but my job ran out. They went out of business.

How long were you homeless?
For five years.

And you stayed in Richmond?
Yes.

So you lived in Bainbridge at that time? And then you lost your job?
Well at that time I wasn't living in Bainbridge, I was over in {__?}. And when my job ran out so did my money. So I wasn't able to keep my room. Then I just moved down here.

What was it like?
Rotten. It was a very bad feeling.

Where did you stay? Did you stay in shelters?
Wherever I could.

Were your kids with you then?
No

You've been through so much and you've gotten to this point. I don't know what its like. Well, I do have a job now.
Where do you work now?
Mixing Bowl Bakery

Do you enjoy that?
Yes.

How did you get to that job?
Department of Rehabilitation.

And you’re doing lots of stuff now. And you know quite a few people now. So you were homeless for five years living in Richmond?
Yes.

And you came here after somebody told you about it.
Yes.

What kind of jobs did you have before?
I worked at White Tower.

What’s that?
A restaurant. White Tower restaurant.

Okay. Is that here? I’ve never heard of it.
It went out of business. Out at Sixth Street.

Where was it? Because I’m not from Richmond.
They have restaurants all over the city of Richmond.

And they closed down completely?
Yes.

When was this?
Back in 1989. January of 89 was the last, they closed the store on Lombardy, that’s the last one that closed.

Is that where Julian’s is now?
No, it’s right down on the corner. Beside the White Tower restaurants, they owned Golden Skillet, too. They also own The Dump. So when the White Towers closed, they closed the Golden Skillets, too.

I used to live up on Hull Street. There’s a Golden Skillet, there was one, there too.
The owner, he was from Connecticut, he just decided to close it, and was on his way to Boston.

So he wasn’t from Richmond.
No.
So he really didn’t have a lot of involvement in the neighborhood.
No.

Are there things in Carver that you really like about this neighborhood?
They’re pretty active. There’s a lot of different things that goes on. Like the health fair at school.

Do you help with the health fair?
I help out if I don’t have to work.

Are there things that you dislike?
No.

If I asked you this question ten years ago, what would you have said? I’m going to say seven years ago, when you first moved here. What did you like about it.
It was very strange.

How?
Moving to a neighborhood that I didn’t know nothing about. And I was worried about the drugs.

Do you see that?
Nope. And nobody bothers with us at the home.

If you don’t mind me asking, it seems this is a predominantly African American neighborhood. As a white lady, have you had any problems with that?
Nothing.

With your church, you go to church in the Fan?
Blessed Holy Trinity.

Have you seen any changes over the years? With the Church? How long have you been there?
Three years.

Have there been any changes?
No. They’re active in the community.

In the Fan?
Yes. And with the city of Richmond. They participate in various organizations.

My next questions talk about...Let me ask you. Growing up in Bainbridge, before, because you were a child, do you see any changes in segregation and desegregation? Maybe with your schools?
Well, there were always problems.
What kind of problems?
Violence.

I'm going to stop for a minute because of this [vacuuming]

Okay, with Carver, have you seen any moments of change in the seven years that you've been here?
No. The new Siegel Center. Sometimes it fouls up parking. The Arts Center.

Do you have access to the Siegel Center?
I guess you can go there for the basketball games and other events.

Do you ever go to the events there?
No. Not yet.

How have the people in Carver adapted to the changes that you've mentioned? The new Siegel Center?
Well, so far, I haven't heard of any problems.

Can you tell me one story that captures life in Carver in the past 7 years?
No.

What about the role of women in the community have you seen that change? Maybe with your leadership projects?
Well, it's now a woman. There aren't as many women as there are men.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the leadership project?
Well, we would meet on Thursday nights, and we would talk about issues like conflict, stress management, talking to the media.

So you're learning skills?
Right. And community projects and internship, and I had to do steady hours of internship, which I tried to do on Wednesday night.

What'd you do there?
Filing, learned to do the computer. I find that interesting. And then December 16 we graduated and received certificates.

Congratulations. And I understand you have a leadership project to do?
Well that's unspecified. Something kept coming up and that project didn't want to go right.

What do you think are the greatest problems facing the neighborhood?
I've been dealing with the issues of the Maggie Walker school.
Can you tell me a little bit about that? 
They’re trying to open that school to the Governor’s School. I think that caused some conflict. 
Some people think that sometime down the road that might change the neighborhood. And they 
don’t want that. I guess out of respect for Maggie Walker.

What are the approaches to improving the neighborhood that you would like? 
I like to discuss things because it helps to discuss the minor problems, like the parking and traffic 
and so forth, I think we all should make some changes in order to improve our neighborhood. 
I’ve learned there are all kinds of big hassles, but a nice neighborhood looks good, especially on 
Broad Street it doesn’t look nice. [can’t tell what is said here]

Do you think it blocks, do you think it kind of covers Carver up or do you think its an 
improvement. 
It’s an improvement.

What do you like the least as far as changes? 
I’m not sure.

What would you like to see happening in Carver? 
I’m not sure on that one either.

Those are all the questions. Do you have anything else you want to talk about? 
Just that Carver has to give us, new Clay House, a chance. They’re a little skeptical. They’re not 
sure what to expect or not. Actually, I wasn’t sure what to expect from them. But after a while 
they finally accepted us, and I feel I’ve been accepted into the community.

Do you think Carver is the type of neighborhood that more readily accepts? 
I think if you don’t try to force yourself on them. Which they went in and talked to them and told 
them what their intentions were, and so I think ... I know some that it doesn’t do, I mean they 
just go around your neighborhood, they don’t try to sell the relationship, they just go and show 
no respect to the community. I don’t think that’s right. [can’t understand the next part] And so I 
think that’s the difference between us and them. And that’s helped.

Anything else? 
No

Well thank you very much Mrs. Hudson.